

## [Big Fred]

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FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Wayne Walden

ADDRESS 51 Bank Street

DATE Sept. 16, 1938

SUBJECT BIG FRED TELLS A TALL TALE

1. Date and time of interview Evening of Sept. 12, 1938
2. Place of interview Union Square, New York City
3. Name and address of informant "Big Fred" is a longshoreman. Address to be ascertained later.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Met him in a public park - Union Square

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NEW YORK

FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Wayne Walden

ADDRESS 51 Bank Street

DATE Sept. 16, 1938

SUBJECT BIG FRED TELLS A TALL TALE

1. Ancestry American
2. Place and date of birth U.S. - a New Englander
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates Common school perhaps
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates Lumberjack, teamster, longshoreman
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities
9. Description of informant A large man over sixty years

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10. Other Points gained in interview

“BIG FRED TELLS A TALL TALE”

by Wayne Walden

(Lumberjack yarn) 1-6

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Wayne Walden

ADDRESS 51 Bank Street New York City

DATE September 16, 1938

SUBJECT BIG FRED TELLS A TALL TALE

Big Fred and several others were indulging in reminiscences of by-gone times. The talk was of the northwest logging camps, and Big Fred, a former lumberjack, was doing most of the talking. Despite his years, Big Fred seems still capable of bucking big logs and, more certain, possesses the faculty of telling tales the veracity of which may be questioned.

Fred claims that years ago he sometimes “chased around with Paul Bunyan”, that Paul “wasn't a bad plug”, that modern phases of the lumber industry require more up-to-date methods.

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“Paul Bunyan was all right in his time, but he didn't have the big shots of today to deal with — and he never was able to get rid of the crumbs. It was the Wobblies - and you got to give 'em credit for it — that really done something about the crumbs. That was one of their big fights.”

“In Bunyan's day the camps was crummy, the bunks was crummy, and the men was so used to being crummy that they wouldn't of knowed what to do without 'em. After the Wobs begun to have some say-so on the jobs they begun to holler for clean bedding, and that sort of put the skids under the crumbs — a lot of 'em anyway.”

“A crumb is what you'd call a louse” said Big Fred, with a tone of pity, 2 for one so ignorant as I seemed to be. “They was called 'cooties' by the soldiers during the war, but they're the same thing; we always called 'em crumbs. Anyhow - as I was going to say - one time when one of the big shots come out to look things over, he stuck his head in one of the bunk-house doors. Before he could duck back again he heard a bunch of voices yelling at him, 'Hello Brother'. It kinda puzzled him. After a while, when he seen that the crumbs were coming to meet him, and was actually calling him their brother, the boss got mad. He figured that that was an insult to his dignity, you see.

“What do you mean by calling me your brother? he says to them. 'Well, we are, ain't we?' they says. 'We don't need no interpreter,' they says, 'we may be a little different looking on the outsides, but we got the same souls, ain't we?' they says to him. 'We get our livin' from the same source, don't we?' they says, 'It's the blood of the guys you get workin' for you,' they says, 'You bleed 'em by day, and we bleed 'em by night', they says 'that makes you and us blood-brothers', they says to the boss. 'Yeah?' says the boss, 'well as you weaken 'em and rob 'em of some of their energy, I'm going to kill you,' the boss says to the crumbs.”

“All right,' says the crumbs - 'hop to it, but you'll lose the best ally you got, or ever had.' 'How so? says the boss. 'Well,' says the crumbs, 'ain't it our gouging into the hides of your

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slaves that keeps 'em so busy scratching they can't do any thinking? And as long as they can't think', they says, 's 'your slaves won't bother to organize', they says. 'They won't demand any improvements', they says ...

“And, well, by that time, I was kind of tired with their damned propaganda...” Fred says.

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FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Wayne Walden

ADDRESS 51 Bank St. New York

DATE October [?], 1938

SUBJECT “BIG FRED” HAS A FAST RIDE

On a previous occasion I had heard “Big Fred” tell something of a whopper relative to the north-west woods. A few evenings ago I again came across him as he stood conversing with some cronies. But now the talk was of this modern age, and particular of its speed. Finally I heard this, which may or may not be a tall tale, but it does tax one's credulity.

Big Fred speaking-something of a drawl:-

“Talkin' bout speed, I'd liked to had some of you guys with me a couple of months ago. I don't know what kind of a car it was, [bit?] it sure could go. The fellow driving the car was

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a Jap, and there was only me and him in it. We left town here and was out fifty miles in less than an hour, that was makin' pretty good time I thought, but when we got out where the traffic thinned down, the Jap steps on it. We had the radio going to kind of occupy our minds as we went along, and every so often he had to slow down to let the waves catch up."

"But", put in an incredulous member of the group, "but do you know that radio waves travel thousands of miles in a second, way up in the thousands?"

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"Well, we must of been beatin' that", said Fred," cause we couldn't get the drift of what the program was 'cept by slowing down once in a while."

\*\*\*\*\* D — [?] INTERVIEWER, MR. WALDEN:

(The following is true, but is merely a vivid memory of long ago and far away. If "valueless" to the folkstuff, I shall not be offended.)

Years ago, in the mountains of Colorado, lived an old veterinarian whose name was "Doc" Squires. He was something of a local character, and characteristic of him were some of the oddest word formations that I have ever heard. Given to raillery, the old man upon an occasion when cigarettes were being discussed, said: "I cannot see why boys will go on smoking those founounded cigareets when they know that it is conjurious to their institutions - why it's utterly rickydoodulous."

Then too, there was old Jack [?], a tall lanky, and grizzled prospector, whom I remember as quite a character of those same parts. Relating on experience he had, when suddenly confronted with a bear, he said:

"I was coming down the trail when all of a sudden I see this here bar spending on his hind feet lookin' at me. The only thing I could do was to hit for the nearest tree I could find.

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The nearest tree was a scrubby little pinion, but I lit out for it and climbed it. But when I'd climbed it as far as I could go, I looked down and seen that my feet was still on the ground." What happened to the "bar" I never learned, or have forgotten.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM D Extra Comment

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Wayne Walden

ADDRESS 51 Bank Street, New York City

DATE September 16, 1938

SUBJECT "BIG FRED" TELLS A TALL TALE

"Big Fred" is a man about sixty years old, a large and rugged individual, apparently a real American type, whose background has been the lumberwoods, longshoring, and that of a teamster. He would seem to be an honorable man, despite that these stories (of which this is the first reported rendering of his many tall tales) are definitely a stretching of the truth.

Fred Roys (the informant) lives at 113 Seventh Ave. NYC, and is the caretaker of the building. He frequently meets, of an evening, with a number of friends and acquaintances on the street near Union Square. He, among those who generally "hang out together", seems most interesting as a type and a source of folk material. Believe I shall get more from him.

Paul Bunyan was all right in his time, but he didn't have the big shots of today to deal with — and he never was able to get rid of the crumbs. It was the Wobblies — and you got to

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give 'em credit for it — that really done something about the crumbs. That was one of their big fights.

In Bunyan's day the camps was crummy, the bunks was crummy, and the men was so used to being crummy that they wouldn't of know'd what to do without 'em. After the Wobs began to have some say-so on the jobs they begun to holler for clean bedding, and that sort of put the skids under the crumbs — a lot of 'em anyway.

A crumb is what you'd call a louse. They was called “cooties” by the soldiers during the war, but they're the same thing; we always called 'em crumbs. Anyhow, as I was going to say, one time when one of the big shots came out to look things over, he stuck his head in one of the bunkhouse doors. Before he could duck back again he heard a bunch of voices yelling at him, “Hello, Brother.” It kinda puzzled him. After a while, when he seen that the crumbs 2 were coming to meet him, and was actually calling him their brother, the boss got mad. He figured that that was an insult to his dignity, you see.

“What do you mean by calling me your brother? he says to them. 'Well, we are, ain't we?' they says. 'We don't need no interpreter,' they says, “we may be a little different looking on the outsides, but we got the same souls, ain't we?” they says to him. “We get our living from the same source, don't we?” they says, “It's the blood of the guys you get workin' for you,” they says. “You bleed 'em by day, and we bleed 'em by night,” they says “that makes you and us blood-brothers,” they says to the boss. “Yeah?” says the boss, “well as you weaken 'em and rob 'em of some of their energy, I'm going to kill you,” the boss says to the crumbs.

“All right,” says the crumbs, “hop to it; but you'll lose the best ally you got, or ever had.” “How so?” says the boss. “Well,” says the crumbs, “ain't it our gouging into the hides of your slaves that keeps 'em so busy scratching they can't do any thinking? And as long as they can't thing think “, they says, “your slaves won't bother to organize,” they says. “They won't demand any improvements,” they says ...



And, well, by that time, I was kinda tired of their damned propaganda.

## II - THE BAPTISM THAT DIDN'T TAKE

Them religious revivals they used to have, you don't see much of that sort of goings-on nowadays; but in them days they was great doings. When I was a kid we used to look forward to 'em like we did the 3 circus. Sometimes they was as good as a circus. It was a case of some to Jesus everybody. You had to come in or they'd hound the hell out of you if you didn't. The woods was full of Billy Sundays, and if you could stand out against their persuading you, you was a good one. You had to have what they call stamina. Generally when some of those old hens got a hold of a guy, he was a goner, 'cause the women then went into the revival business with both feet. When they took out after you, there wasn't much use o'running.

But there was one old codger they had a devil of a time a-snaring. He wouldn't fall for their bait at all. They tried every which way to get him, but old Rufe — Rufus Gray his name was — was one guy they couldn't bring into the fold. He had read Bob Ingersoll, I guess, and didn't seem to give a damn if his soul was saved or not. Pie in the sky couldn't move him. The chase went on for years, revival after revival, and still old Rufe couldn't be swayed from the paths of wickedness he preferred to travel. His soul was getting blacker and blacker with accumulating sins, but still the old cuss hung back. The stubborn old geezer seemed sure as hell bound for hell, and the betting was odds against his ever being corraled.

Well, it finally happened that a revival came on and, whether the Bible- punder pounder was more convincing, or whether the sisters put on greater pressure in their persuading whatever it was, old Rufe - maybe he thought it was better to get it over with, but anyhow the old guy shows signs of weakening. He give up arguing and told 'em O-Kay, that he was ready to submit at last.

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Well, of course, landing a hardshell old sinner, the likes of him, caused a lot of rejoicing among the sisters and the brethern. It was a great triumph, something to holler about. All that was lacking now was the baptism. And for old Rufus it'd need more'n a little sprinkling. It'd need a whole damned puddle of water for him to be made pure and radiant!

The baptisings was most of the time done in a lake, about a mile and a half from town. The preacher, and whoever would be his helpers, would lead the converts out to where the water was about arm-pit deep, and them dip 'em under. That's what they done to old Rufe too — they leads him out to where the water was up to his whiskers and then topples him under. But he wasn't counting on being ducked. So he comes up sputtering, and pawing, and madder'n hell. Soon as he untangles himself from their hanging on to him, he starts out swimming to beat the devil himself, and when he gets out in about the middle of the lake he turns his head and hollers out: “Yeah, you would, would you? You'd try to drown somebody, would you? You gawd-damned fools.”

Wayne Walden

New York

CRUMBS

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